UNITED NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
LIMITED

CEDAW/C/1996/L.1/Add.5/Rev.1
29 January 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Fifteenth session
15 January-2 February 1996

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS FIFTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Hanna Beate SCHÖPP-SCHILLING (Germany)

Addendum

IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

B. Consideration of reports

1. Initial reports

Iceland

1. The Committee considered the combined initial and second periodic reports of Iceland (CEDAW/C/ICE/1-2) at its 290th and 291st meetings, on 18 and 24 January 1996 (see CEDAW/C/SR.290 and 291).

2. In introducing the report, the representative of Iceland informed the Committee that the original first report of 1987 had by mistake never been submitted and that the current initial and second report covered the period up to 31 December 1991. He proceeded to inform the Committee about legal changes and recent developments in the field of women's human rights that had occurred in his country since the submission of the report.

3. The representative pointed to various measures in education, including equal rights education in schools and legally mandated vocational training for women. In order to eliminate discrimination, which still existed, an Equal

Status Council and a Complaint Committee had been established. In 1994, a human rights section had been included in the Icelandic Constitution, including a reference to sex. A four-year plan on measures to obtain equal status between the sexes focused on action to promote equal status in the school system, in the labour market, in rural districts and with regard to social rights. The representative described measures taken to eliminate violence against women, including a shelter for victims, payment of damages to the victims of violence and the mobilization of men against violence.

4. The representative illustrated the important participation of women in public life, which had increased steadily since 1979. Since 1980, a woman has been President of the country and was also one of the first democratically elected women leaders in the world. In the last parliamentary elections, women won 25 per cent of all the seats in Parliament. A women's party existed; women's political representation at the municipal level now reached about 30 per cent and in public commissions about 20 per cent.

5. The representative pointed out that discrimination was persistent in the field of employment. Women's participation in the formal economy was very high, but some gender differences existed in wages. The labour market was segregated to some extent. Unemployment affected women more than men. In order to change the wage system and achieve greater balance in family responsibilities, the Government was taking specific measures, including a revision of the act on maternity leave, which should enable men to better assume their caring roles. Municipal governments planned to expand child-care facilities. Women represented more than 50 per cent of university graduates and this was reflected in the public sector in particular. Job evaluation was seen as an important factor for ensuring pay equity.

6. In concluding, the representative stated that the national report prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the debate on women's rights and the present report had helped his country to assess what had been achieved and what steps should be taken in the future.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

7. The Committee welcomed the high-level representation and commended the Government for the frank report and the extensive oral introduction, which supplemented in very large measure the report. The Committee also welcomed the answers to questions posed during consideration of the report.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

8. While the Committee commended the Government of Iceland for amending the Constitution and enacting the Equal Status Act, it was of the opinion that if the Convention had not thereby been incorporated fully into the domestic law of Iceland, then the implementation of the principles of the Convention was adversely affected.

Positive aspects

9. The Committee welcomed the inclusion in the Constitution in 1994 of a provision guaranteeing the enjoyment of human rights without prejudice to gender and was impressed with the work being done by the Equal Status Council.

10. The Committee welcomed the fact that in the procedures adopted by the Complaints Committee, the burden of proof of an allegation of sexual discrimination had been shifted from the complainant to the alleged perpetrator.

11. The Committee commended the emphasis placed by the Government on the eradication of violence and the establishment of a committee to ascertain the extent and causes of violence in the home as well as the provision of an emergency ward to rape victims in the city hospital. The Committee also commended the passage of a law making the State Treasury responsible for the payment of damages to the victims of violence as well as the formation of a Men's Committee aimed at sensitizing men to the problems resulting from violent behaviour.

12. The Committee was gratified about plans by the Government of Iceland to report periodically to the public on the Platform for Action.

13. The Committee viewed with appreciation the establishment of a Children's Ombudsperson to promote and safeguard the rights of children, boys and girls, as contained in the Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

14. The Committee noted with satisfaction the advancement of women in education in general as expressed by the fact that women now represented 50 per cent of university graduates and that a women's study centre had been established at the university.

Principal subjects of concern

15. The Committee noted the lack of statistics in the report and Iceland's failure to comply with general recommendation 9, but noted with appreciation the additional data supplied during the response to the Committee's questions.

16. The Committee was very concerned about the wide differential in the wages of women, and men, in both the public and private sectors and the fact that this could be explained only on the grounds of gender.

17. Further concern was expressed about the fact that, while women surpassed men in jobs requiring no vocational training, at the same time a significantly higher proportion of men held administrative positions in both the public and private sectors.

18. The Committee noted with concern that the cost of contraction was not covered under the public health system.

19. The Committee viewed with concern the lack of adequate information on certain articles of the Convention, particularly article 12, which addresses the rights of women and States Parties' obligations with respect to health care.

The Committee noted the lack of any gender perspective on matters pertaining to women's health, in particular regarding mental health, as well as medical research.

20. The Committee regretted that rural women frequently had fewer opportunities for employment outside the home than did men or those women living in urban areas.

Suggestions and recommendations

21. The Committee recommends that in subsequent periodic reports the Government of Iceland report fully on each article of the Convention and the general recommendations.

22. The Committee recommends that, in future, statistics disaggregated by sex be included in the periodic reports and that the Government of Iceland comply with general recommendation 9.

23. The Committee recommends that the Government take steps to ensure that the principles of the Convention are fully incorporated into Icelandic law and are enforceable in its courts. In particular, the Committee encourages the Government to generate sex-disaggregated data of health needs and services, so as to assist the development of a gender-sensitive health policy.

24. In order to facilitate the enforceability of the Convention in the Icelandic courts, the Committee recommends that steps be taken to introduce a programme of information dissemination and training about the Convention to the judiciary.

25. The Committee urges the Government to continue its determined efforts in the area of equal pay for work of equal value in order to achieve pay equity in all areas of employment in accordance with general recommendation 13. It further requests that future reports contain information on this issue in dealing with the results of the current job evaluation.

26. The Committee suggests that measures be taken as early as possible, for example by adopting affirmative action programmes, to ensure that women are appointed to decision-making positions and to assume leadership roles in all fields of employment.

27. The Committee suggests that future reports reflect analyses of the impact of job evaluation exercises.

28. The Committee feels that revising the law on maternity leave is not enough to achieve a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities by men and women. It therefore recommends that the Government develop other means to increase men's participation in household tasks and child care, bearing in mind the nature of both the paid work done by men and that done by women inside and outside the home.

29. At the same time, the Government should intensify its development of activities to combat traditional gender stereotypes through educational and awareness programmes targeting children and adults.

30. The Committee recommends that the Government take steps to investigate the imbalance between men and women in part-time employment, as this imbalance can be indicative of indirect discrimination of women in the labour market.

31. The Committee recommends that steps be taken to educate judicial personnel about the Convention.

32. The Committee considers that studies on the evaluation of unpaid work should be undertaken as regards both men and women despite the earlier initiative taken.

33. The Committee recommends that the position of rural women be improved in all areas, including opportunities for employment outside the home.

34. The Committee urges the Government to further intensify its information programmes among migrant women particularly those that pertain to the rights of women in Iceland. In order to ensure the protection of migrant women, it further encourages the Government to continue the provision of adequate health and counselling services and monitoring of the increasing number of intermarriages between Icelandic men and migrant women which the Government is undertaking.

35. The Committee recommends an amendment to the Equal Status Act to ensure representation of at least 40 per cent of each sex in public bodies.

36. The Committee recommends that, in view of the successfully completed projects on equal rights education in various schools, equal rights as well as human rights education should be made mandatory in the Icelandic school curriculum.

37. The Committee recommends that the Government include the results of women studies in curriculum reform as well as in the education and training of teachers in order to facilitate the elimination of cultural stereotypes.

38. The Committee urges the Government to adopt a public health approach to the issue of violence against women, and facilitate the reporting of violence also through primary health-care providers.